

News Release

Sustainability Advocate to Highlight Beautiful U Day Program at UMC

By Krista Lemos on Tuesday, April 18, 2006

CROOKSTON, MN (April 18, 2006) – Sustainability advocate Kelly Cain, professor of Environmental Science from the University of Wisconsin at River Falls, will highlight the first annual Beautiful U Day observance at the University of Minnesota, Crookston (UMC) on Thursday, April 20. Cain will participate in the day's activities and then give a public presentation: "On Making a Campus Sustainable, and Beautiful!" at 5 p.m. in Youngquist Auditorium on campus. Admission is free.

Cain will highlight his experiences and thoughts on the global priority of sustainability thinking as it pertains to energy supplies, global warming, and other concerns of living in a world of limited resources, "as if we plan to stay."

Cain has received several teaching and service awards, including the University of Wisconsin system's Teaching Scholar Award and Regent's Teaching Excellence Award, and in 1999, he was selected as a National Peer Mentor for the Learn & Serve America Exchange. In the community, he is active as well since he exemplifies an academic who builds connections with the real world. He serves on numerous city and regional task forces and planning groups with a theme of sustainable land use. He began his career at UW River Falls in 1986, after receiving his Ph.D. at the University of Minnesota. He taught one year at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. Integrated throughout was seven years of teaching wilderness leadership courses and outdoor education for the Wilderness Education Association and Wilderness Inquiry. These courses ranged in location from Wyoming and Idaho to Alaska. In profiling his background, he notes that he has also worked as a "sawmill grunt, carpenter, furniture builder, dude ranch manager, and various other wanderlust activities," thus giving him a broad perspective of people and places.

Cain's teaching and research interests flow from an over-riding focus and belief in the concept of "sustainability." Like David Orr of Oberlin College, Cain says he believes that college campuses should "harness the talents and energies of faculty and students to redesign their own campuses so that one day they are climatically neutral, discharge no waste, enhance biological diversity, and support the emergence of locally sustainable economies. This means converting the university from just a place where education happens to one that educates ecologically."

Sustainable development is gaining in conceptual acceptance in northwest Minnesota, other regions, and many other parts of the world. However, its application requires holistic thinking involving economics, environmental quality, and social equity. While good work is being done in each area, it has often been separated according to specific issues and objectives. Sustainable development requires a different approach – one that recognizes these issues and objectives as interdependent, and that focuses on a comprehensive strategy rather than a series of discrete problems. For example, there cannot be long-term rural or community development unless a healthy environment and equitable social conditions are ensured along with a vibrant economy.

Sustainability is defined in a variety of ways, but a statement by the Center for Sustainable Community Development, Federation of Canadian Municipalities is noteworthy: "Thinking long-term: acting as though we plan to stay" and developing a "new value system built on accepting responsibility for personal, corporate, and institutional life cycle effects on social, economic, and environmental capital." Surely we do want to stay, and surely we do not want to operate in a manner that is unsustainable for present generations and those who follow! Georgia Tech President Wayne Clough recently defined sustainability as "a process that helps create a vibrant economy and a high quality of life, while respecting the need to sustain natural resources and protect the environment. It expresses the principle that future generations should live in a world that the present generation has enjoyed but not diminished."

For the last year or so, UMC has been discussing the concept of a Center for Sustainable Development to provide an umbrella connection for various campus programs which intersect with economics, environment, and social factors. Such a center could better connect UMC to other organizations in the region, develop synergistic partnerships with agencies, and provide a functioning teaching laboratory for students to learn holistic thinking and become better community leaders. Indeed, the entire campus community could become a "Center for Sustainable Development" and be somewhat of a model for the University of Minnesota's initiatives in sustainability.

Last fall, UMC partnered with the Northwest Regional Sustainable Partnership and the Northwest Minnesota Foundation to host a day and a half symposium. In the summer of 2005, a UMC campus energy audit was conducted by Fabien Pommier, a graduate student from France, and two horticulture interns investigated sustainable landscaping to save energy and reduce maintenance. Saving energy is not only a good "sustainability" practice, but it saves money!

The public is invited to the 5 p.m. sustainability presentation on April 20. For more information, contact Peg Sherven, UMC Beautiful U Day coordinator at 218-281-8376 (psherven@umn.edu) or Natural Resources Professor and Dept. Head Dan Svedarsky at 218-281-8129 (dsvedars@umcrookston.edu).

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